Third countries whose nationals are subject to or exempt from a visa requirement: Georgia

2016/0075(COD) - 09/03/2016 - Legislative proposal

PURPOSE: to amend Regulation (EC) No 539/2001 listing the third countries whose nationals must be in possession of visas when crossing the external borders and those whose nationals are exempt from that requirement

PROPOSED ACT: Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council.

ROLE OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT: the European Parliament decides in accordance with the ordinary legislative procedure and on an equal footing with the Council.

BACKGROUND: Council Regulation (EC) No 539/2001 lists the third countries whose nationals must be in possession of a visa when crossing the external borders of the Member States and those whose nationals are exempt from that requirement. It is applied by all Member States for the exception of Ireland, the United Kingdom, as well as Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland.

Georgia is currently listed in Annex I of the Regulation, i.e. among those countries whose nationals are required to hold a visa when travelling to the territory of EU Member States.

The EU-Georgia Visa Liberalisation Dialogue was launched in June 2012. In February 2013, **the European Commission presented the Georgian Government with an action plan on visa liberalisation** (VLAP). The VLAP is structured around four 'blocks': document security, including biometrics (block I), migration and integrated border management, including asylum (block II), public order and security (block III), and external relations and fundamental rights (block IV).

Before the start of the Visa Liberalisation Dialogue, the EU and Georgia had concluded in parallel a Visa Facilitation Agreement and a Readmission Agreement, which entered into force on 1 March 2011. Their full and effective implementation has been an underlying condition for the launch and the continuation of the visa dialogue.

It is considered that **Georgia has met all the benchmarks set out in the Visa Liberalisation Action Plan** presented to the Georgian Government and therefore fulfils the relevant criteria for its citizens to be exempted from the visa requirement when travelling to the territory of EU Member States.

CONTENT: the Commission proposes to amend Regulation (EC) No 539/2001, **transferring Georgia from Annex I (list of visa-required countries) to Annex II (list of visa-free countries).**

It shall also be specified that the visa waiver will be limited to holders of biometric passports issued in line with standards of the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO).